

Council to Increase Oversight of Schools

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It was a 21-word sentence in an eight-page press release about passage of Montgomery County's \$3.9 billion budget, but it said far more about the evolving relationship between the County Council and the county Board of Education.

Along with the \$1.85 billion the council approved for the school system — a 7.4 percent increase over the previous year — "the council also bolstered its oversight capacity by adding two analysts to exclusively focus on the Montgomery County Public Schools budget," the release said.

The additional "oversight" comes as some County Council members have begun to suggest there should be closer scrutiny of school system operations — a sentiment likely fueled by the recent battle over Seven Locks Elementary School.

The council and school board spent several months battling over the best spot to build an elementary school to ease crowding among Potomac area elementary

schools.

After the county's independent inspector general released a report in February that questioned whether the school system's plan to build a school on Kendale Road was the best, most cost-effective alternative, the County Council put the brakes on the project.

A subsequent report by a joint council-school board task force did not endorse a site but suggested that Kendale was the cheapest alternative next to shutting down the current Seven Locks campus and dispersing its students to other schools. But by then, most council members were convinced Kendale was not the answer, and the plan was killed.

The two bodies ultimately reached a compromise on the building plan. A school will be built at the current Bells Mill Elementary School site, and Seven Locks Elementary will get additional classroom space and a gym. There also will be relief for students at Potomac Elementary.

But even as school board members and the County Council made up the day the deal was struck, the budget item sends a clear message: The desire for more oversight lives on.

An Ervin Run for Council?

County Council President **George L. Leventhal** told staff members at an annual picnic last

week that his top aide, **Valerie Ervin**, plans to resign June 9. The announcement set off speculation that Ervin, a member of the school board, is preparing to run for the council seat being vacated by Tom Perez (D-Silver Spring), who is running for state attorney general.

Leventhal declined to comment on the chatter, saying, "When she's ready to discuss with the press her next step, she'll do that."

If Ervin, a resident of Silver Spring, decides to enter the race, she will join at least two others vying for the District 5 seat: Takoma Park City Council member **Joy Austin-Lane** and Silver Spring resident **Hans Riemer**, political director for the nonprofit Rock the Vote.

Ruben Makes Magazine List

Washingtonian magazine has named longtime state Sen. **Ida G. Ruben** (D) one of the 100 "most powerful women" in the region.

Ruben, president pro tem of the Maryland Senate, is a member of a list that includes Supreme Court Justice **Ruth Bader Ginsburg**, former secretary of state **Madeline Albright** and Sen. **Hillary Rodham Clinton** (D-N.Y.).

"I just could not believe my eyes," Ruben said in a news release from her campaign. "It is very humbling."